

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 AGR-05 COME-00 L-02 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 RSC-01 TRSE-00 SAB-01 SS-15 NSC-05

OMB-01 /051 W

----- 058853

R 062155Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2990

INFO AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRD, EAGR, PN

SUBJECT: 1975 MEAT IMPORT PROGRAM

REFS: (A) STATE 282971; (B) PANAMA 2977 OF 2/5/75

1. ECONOFF AND AGATT CALLED ON MANAGER OF LEADING EXPORT PLANT, ALBERTO GONZALEZ, TO DISCUSS BEEF EXPORT OUTLOOK FOR 1975. GONZALEZ SAID THAT DURING PREVIOUS EVENING HE HAD DISCUSSED WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS PROPOSED VRS LEVEL FOR PANAMA AND THAT BOTH FELT LEVEL OF 3.0 MILLION LBS WAS TOO LOW AND THAT INSTRUCTIONS WOULD BE SENT TO WASHINGTON TO REQUEST A HIGHER LEVEL AND THAT AMBASSADOR'S BUNKER'S SUPPORT WOULD BE ENLISTED ON THIS MATTER. GONZALEZ EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT PANAMA WOULD RECEIVE FAIR TREATMENT BECAUSE IT WAS SUCH A SMALL SUPPLIER TO THE U.S. AND THAT ASSURANCES HAD BEEN GIVEN IN THE PAST (UNDER PREVIOUS RESTRAINT PROGRAMS) THAT PANAMA WOULD ALWAYS BE PERMITTED TO EXPORT WHATEVER IT HAD AVAILABLE.

2. IN TRYING TO PIN DOWN GONZALEZ ON 1975 BEEF EXPORT AVAILABILITY, HE SAID THAT IT COULD BE BETWEEN ONE AND 6 MILLION POUNDS DEPENDING ON PRICE LEVELS. AT CURRENT PRICE LEVELS, HE DID NOT FEEL EXPORTS WOULD EXCEED ONE MILLION POUNDS UNLESS GOP PROVIDED A SUBSIDY WHICH HE SAID WAS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO

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MAINTAIN DEMAND AND LOCAL PRICES TO CATTLEMEN. TO REACH 6

MILLION POUNDS HE SAID THAT PRICE WOULD HAVE TO REACH \$0.70 PER LB. IN LATE 1974 GOP DID PROVIDE A SUBSIDY TO STIMULATE BEEF EXPORTS, BUT THAT SUBSIDY WAS RECENTLY DISCONTINUED. ACCORDING TO HIM, HIS FIRM WAS ONLY ONE TO EXPORT IN 1974 BUT HAS NOW DISCONTINUED SHIPPING AS HE CLAIMS THAT LOSS WOULD AMOUNT TO \$0.30. PER POUND. (A SECOND AND THIRD PLANT EXPORTED SMALL QUANTITIES IN EARLY 1974 AGAINST A QUOTA GRANTED IN LATE 1973.)

3. COMMENT: IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT GONZALEZ AND HIS BROTHER RORY HAVE CLOSE TIES, REPORTEDLY INCLUDING BUSINESS ONES, AND POSSIBLY IN THEIR LIVESTOCK/SLAUGHTER/MARKETING OPERATION, WITH THE GENERAL. THE DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR BUNKER SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR AN APPROACH ON THE PROPOSED VRS LEVEL FOR PANAMA, BEARING IN MIND THAT PANAMA IS ONE OF THE SMALLER SUPPLIERS OF BEEF UNDER THE PROPOSED VRS PROGRAM AND THAT ANNUAL EXPORTS VARY CONSIDERABLY AND ARE SOMEWHAT UNPREDICTABLE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, EXPORTERS, MEATS, EXPORT DATA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PANAMA00780
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750044-0862
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750266/aaaachqd.tel
Line Count: 78
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EB
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 282971, 75 PANAMA 2977, 75 OF 2/5/75
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <09 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: 1975 MEAT IMPORT PROGRAM
TAGS: ETRD, EAGR, PN, (GONZALEZ, ALBERTO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006